

WOMEN ARE TAKING CHARGE AT THE ARUBA BRANCH OF MARRIOTT VACATION CLUB INTERNATIONAL



Aruba is known for its strong winds, but the wind of change in regards to the make-up of the executive business force in Aruba is particularly forceful with the coming of the new millennium. Aruban women are being recognized by major international corporations doing business on the island for what they are capable of, and are being placed in top managerial positions that were usually reserved for men in the past. One such dynamic individual is Bettina Gonzalez, Senior Director of Marketing of the Marriott Vacation Club International.

Effective May 1, Bettina will assume responsibilities as Managing Director, Costa del Sol development, N.V. and Project Director, Marketing & Sales for Marriott vacation Club International (MVCI), here on Aruba. The position is being vacated by Andy Harris, sent from Marriott Headquarters four years ago to be Regional Project Manager of Sales and Marketing for Aruba and St Kitts. Andy is relocating to Florida to direct sales and marketing efforts for MVCI on Marco Island just outside Naples. He is proud of his protégé, whom he recognized as having the qualities and determination

to succeed him, and proposed to her that she look towards directing her career into this strategic and important position two years ago.

In this position, Bettina will be responsible for over \$100 million dollars in gross sales to include Marriott's Aruba Surf Club and Marriott's Aruba Ocean Club. This amount of sales produced by the Aruba MVCI resorts places it as one of the top five selling timeshare resort properties for Marriott, which total fifty-two worldwide, and is increasing. The annual sales results exceed those of all other remaining timeshare resorts in Aruba—combined.

Bettina will oversee the third largest payroll in Aruba, and Andy relates that he "knows of no other company where a female executive is responsible for an annual sales budget of this size." Marriott made the decision to promote her into this position in recognition of her achievements and are very proud that "she is the first female director, she is a native Aruban, and a single mom, so we are very happy for her. In my thirty-two years with the company," relates Andy, "I have never run across a more qualified individual for the position than Bettina."

Bettina has been with Marriott since the year 2000, working her way up the executive ladder based on her performance, drive, team spirit, and natural leadership qualities. Though she went to university in Colombia and earned a degree as a bacteriologist, when she returned to Aruba in 1987 she found little work in her field of expertise, and so she joined Sun Development and began selling timeshare at the Casa Del Mar to earn a living.

This soon led to an executive position in marketing, moving on to other Sun Development projects, then finally, MVCI.

To some extent, she was handicapped by Andy Harris, whose personal and company goal is to identify, recruit and train high potential executives for the different resorts he oversees. When Andy first met Bettina she was Director of Marketing, and then was promoted to Senior Directing of Marketing, taking over for Andy when he was traveling. Upon Andy's departure, the position vacated does not necessarily go to a resident of the country where the resort is located. "Any one of fifty to a hundred leaders were qualified to apply for the position here, and there are several that did; Bettina proved to be the most qualified, and uniquely not only because of her experience and talent, but for many other attributes. She has proven she is the right person for the job."

As part of her new position, Bettina recently attended an Executive Development Conference with top Marriott International people at the Aspen Institute in Maryland, to which less than 1% of all managers are invited to attend, according to Andy. During this private weeklong event, she met with Chairman & CEO of Marriott International Bill Marriott, Steve Wise, President of MVCI, and Chief Financial Executive Bill Shaw in private, closed sessions.

Additionally, Bettina sits on the executive committee along side executives of the Marriott Hotel. This is important for the exchange of ideas and opportunities for all the Marriott properties, which are numerous in Aruba. She is responsible for the marketing and sales of the Marriott Surf and Ocean Clubs, the resale operation and the business transactions within the Chamber of Commerce. In Andy's opinion, having the "capability and capacity to multitask is very important. Having the business knowledge and street savvy in order to make the right decisions in tough times is very critical. I think of the past

years as a collaborative effort that has been very successful."

Marriott offers opportunity for advancement at all levels. Andy took note that in the four years he has been working with Bettina they have seen more than twenty-five promotions into supervisor and managerial positions go to local Aruban talent. All those holding directorships and positions at department head level in the Aruba MVCI are now either Aruban or long-term naturalized citizens, and female. This is groundbreaking for most executive facilities, not only with Marriott International. Most, like Bettina, have worked their way into their positions, proving themselves along the way. "MVCI has a priority in addition to being very selective who they recruit by using extensive screening processes," explains Bettina and Andy, "they require of their managers to develop these people. This is the best way to grow within the company: by preparing someone to take over your position and compete with others that may want that position, so you can move on to a higher-level"

Bettina acknowledges that she has learned a great deal from Andy. "He has very high standards, having worked with the company for so long; he really knows what is required to work for Marriott and MVCI. While he develops you, he recognizes exactly the strengths that you have, and he guides you in the direction where you will do your best. He doesn't micro-manage you, but is confident that you can do the job that is required. Being developed does not guarantee you will advance in the company, one has to work very hard for it and earn it."

Bettina admits that when she first came to work for MVCI, she wasn't thinking of coming back into timesharing, but she was attracted her by possibility of relocation internationally in marketing elsewhere after a period of learning and growth. "Andy proposed to me that I should consider becoming a project director, recognizing that I had the qualities for the position, and he opened my eyes to the possibilities to what I can do, and developing me for the position. A little over two years ago I changed my goal and we began my training to be Project Director."

The additional element that Bettina is a single mother makes her achievement

all the more admirable. She was widowed two years ago, and left with two young daughters. She is grateful to Andy and the entire MVCI team for their support in helping her to balance her home life and work life. "It is important to have a support system at work and at home to be able to devote what is needed to reach the top managerial positions," she observes. "It hasn't been easy, one has to put in a lot of hours, but I am the same as any mother, we all have the same concerns, worrying whether we are spending enough time with our kids, and devote the time needed to pursue a career. I think my children find that I am setting an example for them, and they are inspired by seeing how hard I work to realize my goal. I think this important for all our Aruban youth, to show them they have the power to advance as far as they care to dream."

Bettina obviously has a natural talent for marketing, but credits her education in helping her grasp what is necessary to advance in her profession. "I have a feeling for leadership, and I am good at recognizing what people can do to help us work as a team to achieve our goals, plus I am very good with numbers. I think having that as a forte, being able to recognize what it takes to get the job done, and seeing that it is done, has helped me advance in the vacation owners-hip industry."

In the past few years, Aruba has seen many changes in the job market, with women achieving high executive and important positions in both the public and private sectors. Bettina expressed that those that have broken the "glass ceiling" at present "can be role models for Aruba's young women. In Aruba we still have further to go, as I do believe there is more talent out there that can achieve high positions for which they are willing to prepare themselves. In the end, whether it is a woman or a man in the position, it should go to whoever can do the job best. At least now, women have a choice; and by example, those of us that are successful can show that women can pursue these positions."

Being successful and profitable facilities, the Aruba resorts

offer enormous opportunity internationally for aspiring executives. Bettina acknowledges that there is the possibility that she would consider doing as Andy; moving on and up in the Marriott International Corporation ladder. However, her main priority now is to lead and keep the Aruba MVCI on 'the same successful path as Andy has maintained it, and of course to improve on that. I would hope to do as well as he did, but what the future brings, who knows? If so, I will try to develop whoever may succeed me as well as Andy did."

The Marriott Resorts in Aruba have been the vanguard on many fronts in regards to employee relations, community involvement, and social programs since it first opened over ten years ago. The placing of Bettina Gonzalez and other women in the most key marketing management positions certainly is groundbreaking and heartening to all women in Aruba that aim to "make it" in what has traditionally been a male-oriented field. As expressed by Andy Harris, Marriott International is very proud of the accomplishments of Bettina and her female colleagues, and acknowledges that these women not only meet but also exceed their standards, which would qualify them to work in any resort around the world.

